

Letter from Elsie Bell Grosvenor to R. J. Waterous, May 3, 1939, with transcript

P A. G. Bell May 3, 1939 The Right Honorable R. J. Waterous, Mayor of Brantford, Brantford, Ontario Dear Mayor Waterous:

Your telegram of April 27 did not come to my attention until now, as I have been out of town.

I deeply appreciate your interest and the interest of the people of Brantford in my father's life which prompted your telegram. It seems hard to understand how I can co-operate with you in your endeavor "to rectify the film" put out by Twentieth-Century-Fox and entitled "The Story of Alexander Graham Bell."

It was the original intention of the producer of this film, after picturing the love story of Alexander Graham Bell and Mabel Hubbard, to add a concluding chapter portraying them as of 1916–1917, and to introduce the dedication of the Alexander Graham Bell monument at Brantford.

To assist in the production of this final chapter, my husband and son and I took to Hollywood the motion picture which my husband arranged to be made of the ceremonies at the dedication of the monument in October, 1917. With the help of this historic film and at great expense, I am advised, the producer "made up" Don Ameche as Alexander Graham Bell and Loretta Young as Mrs. Bell, to represent their respective ages in 1917, but the resulting reels were extremely disappointing, and they were discarded by the producer.

My husband and I have had no experience in the making of motion picture stories, but after our visit of several days in Hollywood at the Twentieth-Century-Fox Studios and after

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conferring with the very intelligent men and women at work there, we can better appreciate the enormous difficulty of constructing a biographical film that will win popular approval.

I had hoped that scenes might be introduced into this picture story telling of my father's life in Edinburgh, in Brantford, in Philadelphia, in Washington, where he lived for 40 years, and in Baddeck, Cape Breton, where he spent nearly 40 summers. But the director and author found this impossible. The main purpose of the author and producer of the play was to tell the inspiring romance of Alexander Graham Bell and Mabel Hubbard, all of which occurred in Boston and Cambridge, as Mrs. Bell did not visit Brantford until after her wedding.

As my husband wrote to our dear friend, The Honorable William F. Cockshutt of Brantford, early last month, in many respects the story is excellent, but I fear many will be disappointed in the fact that only five years of Mr. Bell's life are reviewed in this picture story.

Sincerely yours, (MRS. GILBERT GROSVENOR)

COPY * Received Apr. 24, 1939

Moved by: G. F. Sterne

Seconded by: J. J. Kelly

That whereas a year or more back the Twentieth Century Fox Film Company announced their intention to prepare a picture around the invention of the Telephone by Alexander Graham Bell,

AND whereas at that time Mayor Waterous presented indisputable facts (including the statement of Mr. Bell) that the actual conception and first use took place here, and was promised that Brantford would be given proper recognition;

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AND whereas in the picture prepared Brantford is not mentioned and the film company refuses this acknowledgment even over the protest of the Bell Telephone Company of Canada, the American Telegraph and Telephone Company, and members of the family of the distinguished inventor;

AND whereas in consequence the picture will be misleading and contrary to established facts;

BE IT RESOLVED that this Brantford Assembly No. 178 of the Native Sons of Canada protest these inaccuracies and suggest the film be not permitted to show in Canada until they have been corrected. AND in the event of it being, that the Native Sons of Canada organize a boycott as a tangible expression of their protest.

AND that copies of this resolution be sent to Canadian Board of Censors, the Producing Company, the General Secretary of this organization, the Hon. W. Ross Macdonald, M.P., the Hon. H. Louis Hagey, M.L.A., and the press.

COPY — Rec'd Apr. 15, 1939 E. J. Campbell, Clerk CLERK'S OFFICE CITY OF BRANTFORD Brantford, April 11, 1939. Messrs. The 20th Century Fox Studios Hollywood, California Dear Sirs:

Herewith I beg to forward you a copy of a resolution passed by the Council of the City of Brantford, at its general meeting held April 10th, 1939:—

“WHEREAS, the 20th Century Fox Studios Company have produced or have under production a Motion Picture purporting to portray the life of Graham Bell the Inventor of the Telephone,

And Whereas, this Council have received a number of protests from persons who have seen a preview of the picture or have read the script of same and have reported that Brantford's connection with the invention of the Telephone is almost completely ignored,

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And Whereas, any story of the life of Graham Bell in which his residence in Brantford and his activities in connection with the invention of the Telephone during that time is not given a prominent place would be pure fiction and not founded on fact,

And Whereas, the Mayor of the City of Brantford did at considerable trouble secure accurate and correct data and placed same at the disposal of the Company producing the Picture and has correspondence assuring him that scenes of Bell's life would be filmed at the Bell Homestead so that the picture may be historically correct,

And Whereas, Professor Graham Bell did at the unveiling of the Memorial in his honour state that the idea of the Telephone was conceived in Brantford, and the first successful transmission of sound over wire took place in this City which statement links up this City with the invention of the Telephone and is undeniable proof of the claims of this "The Telephone City" in the matter,

And Whereas, the Province of Ontario conducts a censorship of pictures to be shown in Ontario with authority to refuse to license such pictures as may be detrimental to or not in the Public interest,

And Whereas, the showing of this picture as at present constituted will do an injustice not only to the City of Brantford, but to the 2 Province as a whole and create a false impression in the minds of the Public as to the facts in connection with the life of Graham Bell.

Therefore, this Council respectfully requests the Censor Board of the Province of Ontario to take such action as may be necessary to have that part of the film dealing with the invention of the Telephone carried out in its proper sequence, and the City of Brantford given its place in the story, and in the event of the failure of the Producing Company to carry out this part of the story, to ban the showing of the film in the Province of Ontario

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and that a copy of this resolution be sent to the Board of Censors, the Hon. Mitchell F. Hepburn, Mr. H. Louis Hagey, M.L.A. and to the 20th Century-Fox Studios.

Yours truly, (signed) E. J. Campbell City Clerk